

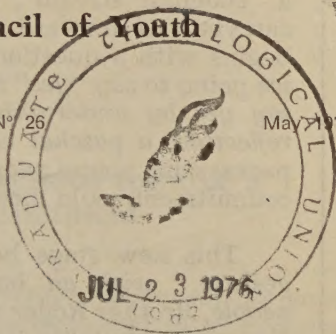
Letter from Taizé

Living the Council of Youth

Quarterly

Letter N° 26

May 1976



the paschal commitment :

Certain that a small number of women and men, spread across the face of the earth, striving to reconcile in themselves struggle and contemplation, can change the course of history and reinvent the world :

Because of the risen Christ, are you going to risk your life day after day, constantly setting out anew, never discouraged because loved with Eternity's love ?

Will you let yourself be consumed by the passion for a communion in Christ's wounded body ?

With the whole of God's people, will you open up paths of hope for all the human family ?

A new stage of the Council of Youth

The first two years of the Council of Youth will have been a time of opening across the world. Like a "conciliar stream", the Council of Youth is now carrying us forward into a new stage. This stage begins with a question, a call to risk our lives : *are we going to say "yes" to a Gospel radicalism ? will we say yes by undertaking, after a time of prolonged reflection, a paschal commitment ?* In the following pages, some young people explain what such a paschal commitment could mean.

This new stage begins as well with a concrete gesture : *with an intercontinental team of young people, Brother Roger will go to live for a time among the poor and dying in Calcutta and among the very poor in Bangla Desh ; there the "second letter to the people of God" will be written.* This gesture is likewise explained in the following pages.

Easter was the starting-point for this new stage. That day there were some 15,000 people at Taizé. During all of Holy Week Spanish, German and Italian were the languages most often heard on the hill. Last to arrive were the French, who came Saturday evening since they had no holidays at Easter this year. As always when there is a large gathering, at least eighty different countries were represented.

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YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION : £ 1 ; \$ 2,50 USA.

For the U.S.A. contributions towards publication and postage to be sent to
" Letter from Taizé ", 2150 Almaden Road-114, San José Ca. 95125, U.S.A.

For the U.K. : c/o 23 Christie Street, Dunfermline, Fife, U.K.

At the same time, several other gatherings took place at Easter-time in other parts of the world. There was the East of the Council of Youth celebrations in Africa, at Lubumbashi (Zaire). And some smaller meetings were held at Rutovu (Burundi), Puebla (Mexico), Melbourne (Australia), and at Guadalajara (Mexico).

The Risen Christ urges us towards a radical commitment

Holy Saturday evening, Brother Roger and the young people who made up the intercontinental team explained how the idea of a paschal commitment came about : the suggestion itself came from Spain, but the call for an ever more concrete commitment to be worked out by each person was heard everywhere during the past months. The dynamic of the Council of Youth leads inevitably toward the radicalism of a commitment. To become aware of this one has only to listen to the following voices, selected from amidst a host of others. Some express a yearning for the future, others a present reality. But always there is that same conviction : the Risen Christ is urging us toward a radical commitment.

Joseph, from Zaire : I see before me the myriad flames of hope which the Council of Youth celebrations have led us to discover... I hear the singing of the Beatitudes. But in this time of sadness, what I am most aware of is the great lamentation of the People of God. As a people we are

strong, yet we seem powerless. What can we do to awaken a new confidence? Everywhere on earth, the economic crisis is reinforcing the law of the jungle, every-man-for-himself, and weakening any sense of generosity. If we are indeed committed to living beyond every hope, we must hurl ourselves into the very heart of people's and societies' lives, so as to re-awaken the flickering flame and to spark an awareness of the many signs which God is bringing to birth right among his people.

A boy from Syria : I send you my joy and that of the youth of my town, in this new stage of the Council of Youth. For us, this Easter will be a sign of hope to soothe our wounded hearts and calm our souls, sick to death on account of our dear Lebanon and our dear Palestine. Christ's own land is watered by the blood of innocents. His cross is raised up once again. Sometimes I beg him : Lord, you have forsaken us long enough, come back and visit the land you loved, the land that nourished and welcomed you.

I would like to share with you the testament of a 22 year-old Lebanese boy. He wrote it just before leaving to celebrate Christmas in his native village. While on his way there he was killed. May his final words serve as a simple gesture of commitment as we make our way toward the light of Christ. Perhaps a part of it could be published in the *Letter from Taizé*... He writes :

Everyone, Lebanese and others living in Lebanon, is in danger. As I am one of them, I see myself being kidnapped and killed on the road leading to my village of Nabha. In case this intuition proves true, I am leaving this message for my family, for the people of my village and of my country. To my mother and my sisters I say with full assurance : do not be sad, or at least do not weep and mourn excessively ; my absence, no matter how long it seems, is brief : we will meet again, without a doubt, we will meet again in heaven's eternal dwelling ; that is where joy is, or sadness if we are excluded. But do not fear : God in his mercy will reunite us all.

I would like to ask you one thing : forgive with all your hearts those who put me to death. Join me in asking that my blood — even though it is the blood of a sinner — may wipe out the sin of Lebanon. Mingled with the blood of all the fallen victims, on all sides and from all religious confessions, may it be offered as the price of the peace, the love and the understanding which have vanished from our land, and indeed from the entire world. May my death teach charity to men ; may God console you, take care of you, help you in life. Do not be afraid — I have absolutely no regrets in leaving this world. What pains me is that you will be sad. Pray, pray, pray and love your enemies.

To my fellow-citizens I say : the members of a family can argue without remaining bitter, they get angry at one another without killing ; remember the days of brotherhood and charity, reject the days of separation and quarreling.

A group from Argentina : ...As a result of our faith-commitments, a number of us have become involved in political activity. But many have not been able to deal with the apparent duality, and more than once have left their faith behind or have followed only a part of the Gospel message.

Others have too quickly given up in the face of the concrete difficulties which they encountered. They have chosen to remain passive, or to undertake social-service or pastoral activities where they did not really have to put their lives on the line.

Still others have spoken the language of liberation and commitment, without any real change in their lifestyles and plans to accompany their words.

Often, while criticizing the positions of the institutional Church, we have not accepted the responsibilities we should have taken within the Church.

And yet, some of us have been faithful to the Spirit, attempting — and often succeeding in — a remarkable synthesis.

Borne by a common hope, today we wish humbly to say to all the members of God's People : we are certain that God is active in our history. This is the most solid foundation of our hope...

David, from the USA : There is hope in the world today. We are a people of God. A universal community. We need not to despair or to give up. Everywhere we find people struggling and Christ is still preparing the springtime of the Church. People are really risking to come out of their long winter sleep and let some of their color and beauty begin to spread all over the world.

A girl from Spain : My name is Consuelo ; I was born in the neighborhood of Madrid where I still live. My home is in a working-class district ; its residents are members of the world of the poor, the forgotten, the oppressed, people with no culture and no voice. They live in houses covering only a few square yards, lacking even minimal health-requirements. There is a shortage of schools ; many people work sixteen hours a day, while others are unemployed. And what is worse : they live turned inward upon themselves, unable to communicate.

In this situation a sign of hope has sprung up : a tiny parish community, "St. Athanasius". An open community whose affection, friendship, hospitality and sharing are living questions for the people of the neighborhood. It is a new way of living that is changing the image of the Church as cold and dehumanizing, a Church made up of norms and laws, into a Church where it is possible to live the love and joy of the Risen Christ.

The community is composed of about 200 people of all ages, from adults to small children. It is like being part of a large family, where in simplicity everything is shared : homes, food, difficulties. For us a most important facet of our life is the dialogue, the communication and affection which unites the different generations.

The Eucharist, a celebration in which all take part, is where we find the strength to continue, the strength to be signs of salvation in the district. What impels us to keep on struggling alongside others is the life of the Risen Christ. He is the one who enables us to live at one and the same time struggle and contemplation.

When I tried to tell others of my experiences, I saw that they had difficulties in understanding. They would question me without being able to believe what I said. They kept asking me if I was talking about an already-existing reality or just a hope. I would like everyone to know that it is a reality, a living reality full of hope for an oppressed neighborhood, for a tired-out Church, a reality in which I see concrete signs of the Resurrection.

Octavianus, from Indonesia : Together with other young people from different continents, forming tiny cells of the Council of Youth, I made some visits in the USA and in Africa. The deep sense of those travels in this : together with the people revealing that we belong to one universal family, praying together beyond whatever divides us, listening to one another beyond what makes us deaf, trying to understand one another beyond what makes our heart hard and closed, beyond what dehumanizes us.

(continued on p. 10)

"Do you love me?" is Jesus' last question to Peter (John 21, 15-17), Peter saddened and appalled at having three times denied Jesus before his torture on a cross. Now here is the risen Lord before him. Yet Jesus does not condemn him for his denial! He does not adopt an attitude of strength. He does nothing to tighten the noose of back conscience already round Peter's neck. In Christ compassion is the heart of humanity since he too, during his life on earth, passed through ways of darkness.

To Peter, Christ says only these few words: "Do you love me?" And Peter replies: "Lord, you know I love you." A second time, Jesus asks: "Do you love me?" Again Peter answers: "But you know I love you!" A third time, Jesus insists: "Do you love me more than the others do?" And Peter is troubled: "Lord, you know everything, you know how I love you!"

Since that day, each person on the earth is tirelessly being asked by Christ: "Do you love me?"

There are days when we refuse to listen: the question becomes intolerable. It is unbearable for any person who has never experienced human love, for any who feel totally forsaken, experiencing nothing but the wound dealt to their childhood innocence. It is unbearable for all of us when it uncovers within us the place of solitude that no human intimacy can ever fill, that place of solitude where God awaits us. And when revolt is at its height, the question rings like a condemnation, so true it is that nobody can love by an act of the will.

Do we sufficiently realize that Christ never obliges anyone to love him? But he, alive, is at each one's side, like somebody poor, obscure. He is there, even during the shabbiest moments, in life's fragility. His love is a presence.

Eternity's Love

not for a fleeting moment but for ever. Eternity's love opens towards a future beyond ourselves. Without that elsewhere, without that future lying beyond himself, man has no hope left ... and the eagerness to advance fades away.

In the presence of Eternity's loving, we sense how our real response cannot be a fleeting one, just for a while, only to turn back afterwards. But neither can our response be an effect of the will, through which some people would be broken. Rather, it involves a surrender of ourselves.

To come before him, with or without words, is a matter of knowing where to find our heart's rest, of responding in our poverty. There lies the secret spring of our existence, the Gospel's risk. "Even if sometimes I no longer know if I love you or not, Christ, you know everything, you know that I do love you."

Great happiness is offered to any who take the risks of such a love, without calculating all the consequences. Once you seek happiness for your own benefit, sooner or later that happiness will escape you. The more passionately you seek to grasp it, the farther off it flees.

Ardent seeker of Eternity's love, whoever you are, will you find your heart's rest? Through your very wound itself he opens the door to a happiness: praise for his love. Surrender yourself, give yourself. There lies our wounds' healing, not only your own: already in him, we are healed by one another.

Meditation by Brother Roger, Easter morning 1976

We spent some time in the United States, mainly in Philadelphia, being and sharing with the people who are locked up in the ghetto. The daily life, there as in many places in Europe, is blocked by the thick walls of an uncertain future. The people suffer from the pain of a history they didn't create themselves. The burden of history is heavy; the wound is bitter and painful!

Recently we were in Kenya and Tanzania, two of the many countries in the world whose history has deprived them of their essential culture, a history which is like a big stone on the green grass of their springtime.

To say all this is quite painful to me!

Xavier, from India : Octavianus' experience is not very different from that of many of us. How can we join the others who are struggling against these walls of indifference and hopelessness? We can no longer be spectators and let ourselves be defeated. All this calls us to get off the fence and be involved. Our call is to build a human family where the heart of man is without fear, where he is able to grow in his liberty and creativity.

The Risen One is constantly knocking at our door calling us to make a radical commitment, a commitment together with the People of God, in the human family. Together we must set forth with others to translate the Magnificat in our world today.

The paschal commitment

The eve of Easter, keeping in mind all the discoveries made during the past two years, Brother Roger and the young people indicated how the new stage of the Council of Youth would begin.

Realizing that everything was pointing in this direction, the young members of the intercontinental team began by proposing a paschal commitment to each person, the commitment to build up hope in places where it is vanishing. They did this by reading and commenting upon the following text :

The first two years of the Council of Youth will have been a time of opening across the world. Everywhere are manifest the same thirst for God and the same cry for justice. Everywhere there are people charged with hope and radiating it around them. In many places hope is being born for the Church and for the human family. This is spreading in a broadening wake, into which the Council of Youth is being drawn as a "conciliar stream" flowing out towards other seekers of communion.

Still, a large number of people in the world are without hope of any kind. Their future is closed. Thick walls rise before them. They are crushed beneath the burden of a history which seems all-determining. Some are prey to oppression, misery, poverty, unemployment and have nothing to look forward to. Others flee the emptiness of their existence by throwing themselves into careerism, or by following the law of the jungle, every-man-for-himself. Their eyes are blinded, their ears closed.

What challenge in the Gospel opens for everyone a growing personal and collective future ? How to pierce the walls of indifference and hopelessness ? Only one answer : the risen Christ urges us more and more towards a radical commitment, the commitment to build up, with the people of God, hope within the human family.

A long time ago, Christians started to take or renew a lifelong commitment during the night of Easter. So are we too going to say "yes" to a Gospel

radicalism ? Will we say yes by undertaking, after a time of prolonged reflection, a paschal commitment ? Here is that paschal commitment :

Certain that a small number of women and men, spread across the face of the earth, striving to reconcile in themselves struggle and contemplation, can change the course of history and reinvent the world :

Because of the risen Christ, are you going to risk your life day after day, constantly setting out anew, never discouraged because loved with Eternity's love ?

Will you let yourself be consumed by the passion for a communion in Christ's wounded body ?

With the whole of God's people, will you open up paths of hope for all the human family ?

To make real this paschal commitment, by bringing hope to places where it is vanishing, there are many pathways opening before us. Each will choose one, knowing that they are not alone and that they are going to create using the little of the Gospel that each one has grasped.

A small number in this "conciliar stream" will be called to be mobile but most of us will trace out these pathways in the places we live in. Along these pathways of hope we shall be travelling in company with others : people creating spaces of prayer, even involving just two or three ; people struggling at grips with the global situation of society's injustices, struggling against the causes of human alienation ; in company with people who do not share our faith but have a common hope for humanity ; with those who, in God's people, have a ministry to bear, often alone ; with the poor, those starved of justice and thirsting for communion, those forgotten about, left outside, those with no voice.

We shall be advancing along these paths with many young people who in various countries, each Friday evening, wherever they may be, spend a short time praying in communion with those deprived of human freedom.

And the paschal commitment will lead us all to live simply, intent on sharing, in the spirit of the Beatitudes.

**Brother Roger in Calcutta and Bangla Desh, where
the « second letter to the people of God » will be
written**

*Following the young people, Brother Roger explained
the meaning of the voyage to Calcutta and Bangla Desh :*

“All winter, here at Taizé we had many discussions
with young Asians. And it is true too that we have brothers
living in Bangla Desh. They experience conditions not fit
for human beings, sharing the life of the very poor.
Through these brothers of ours it is as if our very own
Desh were entering into the poorest of peoples.

From the exchanges of this winter has come the con-
ception of new risks which have to be taken.

At the opening of the Council of Youth, I said how
young people were asking me to go where there were grave
situations, going either with young people or on my own,
depending on the situations, on the cases. These can only
be limited gestures, poor parables, but they denote what
is involved in.

This year, what sign can be given to say that there is
only one human community, and that the gulfs growing
between North and South are tearing the human family
apart ? Here is the sign that has been proposed :

In October I will go for a time to share the life of the
poor and dying in Calcutta, then the life of the very poor
in Bangla Desh.

An intercontinental team composed of young people
will live there beforehand. The first two of them, both
Asians, will leave here for Asia on Easter evening. Very
soon others will be following them.

In the search as to how to be a ferment of communion in a human community where tensions are mounting, has proved time to write a '*second letter to the people of God*'. In Asia, with the people there and with the intercontinental team, sharing the life of the very poor, together we will write this '*second letter to the people of God*.'

In the same aim of living in reciprocity, we shall have this summer in Taizé the visit of Mother Teresa of Calcutta."

The second letter to the people of God will be made public December 5 in Paris

Then Moiz, from India, gave some details of the voyage. The departure will take place from Germany :

"Perhaps more than anywhere else, in Germany the younger generations feel pulled apart, caught between an economic situation of incredible affluence on the one hand and their authentic desire for a life of sharing and simplicity on the other. Young people from other countries will go to Germany and live there for a time, reflecting with young Germans on how to find hope in a situation where there seems no possibility for change.

Then Brother Roger will go to Germany for two meetings : one in the "Stiftskirche" church in Tübingen on the evening of October 22, the other in the cathedral of Münster on the evening of October 23. The departure from India will take place from Germany on the following day to join some members of the intercontinental team who will already be there.

The 'second letter to the people of God' will be made public the day Brother Roger and some of the young people return, Sunday afternoon December 5, during a service organized by young people in the cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris."

Following the meetings at Tübingen, Münster, and Paris, there will probably be still other meetings, in several different countries...

Registration to be sent to : MEETINGS, 71460 - Taizé-Community, France.

Name :

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First Name :

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(with zip-code and country)

Occupation :

Age :

Will take part in the meeting from to

Will bring own tent :

No-Yes.

Will receive the Letter from Taizé :

No-Yes.

Would like to receive the Letter from Taizé :

No-Yes.

Can be part of reflexion-groups in italian — german — french — english — spanish — portuguese — dutch — swedish.

Can undertake simultaneous translation from into

Need more registration forms / Information material.

Summer meetings at Taizé

They will have a double guiding-line :

— On the one hand they will be aimed at *going more deeply into the paschal commitment*, exploring all its pathos, grasping all its consequences, seeing it in terms of the reality of each one's life.

Each person will take the paschal commitment when he or she is ready. Ways of expression, always discreet, will vary greatly from one person to another. Some will have as their only witness the silence of their hearts. Others will wish to express their commitment by a visible gesture such as receiving the laying on of hands.

— On the other hand, the meetings will be directed to the perspectives of the "*second letter to the people of God*" to be written in November in Asia : how can we become a ferment of communion in the whole human family, especially where freedom is disappearing and the gulfs are growing between South and North ?

WEEKS OF SILENCE : In the context of the paschal commitment many young people will welcome the possibility of spending some days in silence, solitude, prayer and personal reflection. To this end places of silence will be created apart from the meeting-places.

Dates of meetings : Each week, from Monday evening to Sunday afternoon from June to November.

Age : 18 years and older (meetings meant for people between 15 and 17 years of age will take place June 19-20, September 4-5 and October 31 - November 1).

Costs : Everyone contributes as they can ; reckon with a basic cost (food and all) of between 12 and 18 francs per day.

Lodging : in personal tents or large dormitory-tents. If at all possible bring blankets, sleeping-bag, air-mattress, as this equipment is in short supply at Taizé. Also bring your own tent, if you can.

Registration form : See page 15.

Please remember to write announcing your arrival ! Then the work of welcoming and feeding you is easier.